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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000252

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL EG IS TU

SUBJECT: TURKISH, ARAB LEADERS EXCHANGE POST-GAZA CONCERNS

REF: A. ANKARA 229

1B. ANKARA 207

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Turkish and Arab leaders capitalized on a series of high-level meetings this week to address their respective concerns arising from the Gaza crisis. Troubled by GOT statements advocating HAMAS's inclusion in peace negotiations, Saudi King Abdullah, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas, and Egyptian President Mubarak all delivered similar messages encouraging the GOT to support the Egyptian-led Palestinian reconciliation efforts and to publicly acknowledge the PA as the sole Palestinian leader during their respective meetings with Turkish officials. For their part, GOT officials expressed growing concern over Arab division and pressed the Arab leaders to resolve regional differences. END SUMMARY.

GUL ADVOCATES FOR ARAB UNITY IN SAUDI ARABIA

12. (C) President Gul capitalized on his February 3-6 Saudi Arabia trip to counter Arab concerns that Turkey is favoring HAMAS over the Abu Mazen's Palestinian Authority, a misperception based on GOT officials' comments made during Gaza crisis. In a statement to the Turkish press prior to departing for Riyadh, Gul urged HAMAS to constructively engage in the Middle East peace process and noted the importance of fostering unity between HAMAS and Fatah. He added that HAMAS must be part of the process, but must also be aware of the "consequences of taking the wrong path." Gul repeated this message during his speech to the Saudi Consultative Council as the first foreign Muslim leader to address the assembly. He underscored that the main issue is Palestinian unity, adding that "division among Palestinians is destructive dynamite that could undermine the future of a Palestinian state." MFA U/S Apakan told the Ambassador February 11 that Gul emphasized the need for Arab unity during his private meetings with both Saudi King Abdullah and FM Faisal (REF A).

ABBAS underscored the need for PA SUPPORT

13. (C) Palestinian Authority President Abbas visited Turkey February 6-8 to solicit GOT support for the PA's primacy in representing Palestinian interests, according to PLO Ambassador Nabil Maarouf (REF B). Prime Ministry Deputy Undersecretary Hakan Fidan told us that the GOT assured Abbas that Turkey seeks Palestinian reconciliation and views him as the sole Palestinian leader. Turkey's message to HAMAS is that it can only achieve its goals through political means,

he added. Separately, U/S Apakan noted that GOT leadership assured Abbas that Palestinian unity should only occur "under his umbrella." (REF A) During his press conference with Abbas, Gul repeated his call for unity among Palestinian groups, adding that Turkey has no intention of intervening in Palestinian domestic affairs.

GUL ASSURED GOT SUPPORT FOR EGYPTIAN ROLE

¶4. (SBU) During his February 11-12 Istanbul visit, Egyptian President Mubarak and President Gul carefully highlighted both countries' desire to work together to achieve peace and stability in the region. Gul told the press: "We support the efforts of the GOE to establish a lasting peace." He also announced that Turkey would participate in the Cairo Palestinian Reconstruction Conference on March 2. Mubarak responded: "We appreciate Turkey's approach and behavior regarding Egypt's efforts and initiative to achieve the (Gaza) ceasefire." He added "Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to Egypt for consultations on Gaza were also very important. Turkey is one of the moderate powers in the Middle East."

¶5. (C) Egyptian Embassy Political Officer Ihab Soliman characterized Mubarak's visit as a success, adding that it helped to publicly dispel rumors of discord between the two governments over Gaza. He highlighted to us that the Turkish side made correct public statements of support by reiterating that Egypt has the lead role. More importantly, Soliman noted that Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman and Turkish Prime Ministry Senior Foreign Policy Advisor

ANKARA 00000252 002 OF 002

Davutoglu were able to meet in person. Soliman commented that one primary source of tension between Turkey and Egypt during the Gaza crisis was that Suleiman did not understand Davutoglu's role, adding "now he knows who is holding the Turkish cards."

COMMENT

¶6. (C) The Turks are deeply concerned about Arab division and used the high-level meetings with Abdullah, Abbas, and Mubarak to push for resolution. Reflecting this, GOT officials have told us that Turkey's Middle East policy focus is on Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt -- not/not HAMAS. The MFA has underscored that working for Arab unity does not mean that Turkey is "pro-Arab." In what PLO Ambassador Maarouf has dubbed a "new quartet," the GOT also pitched to each Arab leader a joint Turkish, Saudi, Syrian, and Egyptian meeting to promote Arab unity prior to the March 29-30 Arab League Summit, which the MFA tells us both Riyadh and Cairo are rumored to be considering boycotting. One GOT official who attended the Gul-Abdullah meeting commented that the Saudis all but rejected Ankara's proposal due to Syria's participation. Ankara-based Arab diplomats, however, reported to us that their governments focused on the meetings as a means of reining in Turkey's erratic behavior demonstrated during the Gaza crisis. In particular, they said, the leaders were looking for a firm, public commitment from Ankara that the GOT is squarely behind Cairo and Abbas.

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